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ABSTRACT

This report examines results of strategic planning components of three studies which investigated special education teacher retention and attrition. Introductory information enumerates the strategic planning process. The next section highlights similarities and differences among the three strategic planning models that were implemented. The models are compared on the following aspects: timing, selection of stakeholders, roles of stakeholders and researchers, planning method, process, and product. The strategic planning processes and results are then described for each of the three projects. Conclusions include recognition of the quality of the participation of various stakeholder groups in strategic planning activities in all three projects and increased appreciation by stakeholders of the value of a data-based approach to decision making. However, there was insufficient evidence with which to claim impact of the planning models on the teaching and learning environments of the participating districts. Much of the document consists of three appended case studies, which look at strategic planning for teacher retention in the Silver City Unified School District (a pseudonym in Arizona), Memphis City Schools (Tennessee), and San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts (California).

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WORKING PAPER # 8

Strategic Planning for Special Education Teacher Retention

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NATIONAL DISSEMINATION FORUM
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STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION

Strategic planning has become increasingly popular in educational circles as a means of involving key stakeholders in the determination of goals, objectives, and action plans for organizations. Strategic planning provides a framework for setting priorities and establishing action plans to ensure that organizations make the most of their limited resources. The combination of budget cutbacks and the increased complexity of educational and societal challenges has made it more important than ever to achieve a clear sense of priorities in resource allocation and to establish action plans relative to these priorities.

Strategic planning typically consists of the following phases: (1) defining the organizational mission, (2) formulating policies, (3) establishing long- and short-range objectives, (4) identifying strategic alternatives, (5) selecting an appropriate strategy, and (6) implementing the plan (Thompson & Strickland, 1990). The grant announcement under which cooperative agreements were awarded to ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR did not specify these phases. However, OSEP underscored its interest in utilization of research knowledge by requiring that each project include a strategic planning component as a means of helping the educational agencies in which the research data were generated to translate the research findings into practices that would increase the likelihood that special education teachers would remain committed to their careers. The goal of this strategic planning component, then, was to set the stage for improved policies and practices relative to issues influencing teacher attrition in these specific districts as well as for similar districts across the nation. It evolved that each of the three projects utilized different strategic planning techniques in pursuing this common goal.

The next section highlights similarities and differences among the three strategic planning "models" that were implemented. Then the strategic planning processes and results are described in more detail for each of the three projects, as three case studies. The following acronyms are used to designate the three strategic planning efforts:

- ERI--Eugene Research Institute, with the Silver City Unified School District (SCU)[1] in the West
- RTI--Research Triangle Institute, with the Memphis City Schools (MCS) in Tennessee

[1] Silver City is a pseudonym.

- SDSU/AIR--the team of San Diego State University and American Institutes for Research, with the San Diego and the San Jose Unified School Districts (SDUSD, SJUSD) in California

Overview of How the Three Projects Conducted Strategic Planning

All three projects were similar in emphasizing collaboration with key stakeholders, communicating research results to them, helping them to understand the research findings sufficiently to be able to identify strategic actions for addressing selected problem areas, and providing professional "facilitators" to support the groups' planning processes. However, the ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR strategic planning interventions were different in several ways, as follows.

Timing

OSEP originally conceived of strategic planning beginning in the third (final) year of each study, but in fact all three projects integrated the process throughout all three project years. The RTI stakeholder group met twice in Year 1, twice in Year 2, and six times in Year 3; between meetings, members led or convened small group work sessions with local stakeholders to obtain input for developing action plans for the strategies formulated by the larger group. The SDSU/AIR stakeholder group met once in Year 1, twice in Year 2, and three times in the last year of the project; also in the final project year, SDSU met four times with a local policy group of key stakeholders (including administrators and teachers) in the San Diego Unified School District. The purpose of the first two meetings was team building in preparation for strategic planning by this SDUSD group; the other two meetings focused on the development of strategic action plans based on the respondent data from that district.

Selection of Stakeholders

The ERI group began with a 16-member advisory panel which included a mix of central office and building level administrators and teaching staff. For the development of the actual strategic action plan, the district's special education director and ERI staff selected 12 professionals from the district, including the special education director, the human resources director for bilingual and special education, both regional directors of special education, and a selection of program specialists, special education teachers, and building administrators who were both former special education teachers.

The RTI stakeholder group began in Year 1 as a local advisory/planning panel" of 13 stakeholders; they, in turn, augmented their number to 19 in Year 2 and to 21 in Year 3 to represent the district's central office administrators and supervisors, school building administrators, special and general education teachers, parents, the local education association, the special education chair at the state university, and the state department of education.

The SDSU/AIR stakeholder group's representation was even broader; it's approximately 20 members included central office and school site administrators and teachers in the two participating school districts, special education administrators in two county offices of education, the chair of the statewide Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) Administrators Association, chairpersons of the special education teacher preparation programs at four state universities and one private university, the state commission on teacher credentialing, the state teachers association, two professional associations, and the state board of education. There were two overlapping groups of 10 and 12 each at the local SDUSD level.

Roles of Stakeholders and Researchers

By meeting with their stakeholder groups throughout the three-year project period, all three projects were able to extend the groups' role to providing input to the research questions to be addressed, the research design, instrumentation, and interpretation of findings. This active and sustained collaboration was calculated to reinforce a substantive, mutually proactive partnership between the researchers and the stakeholders, and to build ownership of the research findings that were eventually to provide a basis for strategic planning by the stakeholders.

Planning Method, Process, and Product

ERI. The planning process was semi-structured, with ERI providing a basic planning format to follow while allowing for the task force to shape or alter the process as it went along. ERI's role included providing relevant information gained from roughly 200 hours of in-depth interviews with teachers, facilitating the process with the assistance of a professional facilitator, and feeding information from previous meetings and interim evaluations back to the group between sessions. The task force was responsible for identifying the issues that were most pressing to them, developing the plan, and setting its future direction.

Initial meetings of the advisory panel and task force focused on the presentation and

discussion of ERI's study findings, and consideration of alternate perspectives and issues. Subsequent meetings led to the identification of 20 issues relating to improving recruitment and retention of special education teachers in the district, and their subsequent sorting into five problem areas. These were linked to district initiatives when appropriate. The group decided to focus on two of the five problem areas (Working Environment, Balancing the Workload) because these were most amenable to concerted action. The task force then engaged in a brainstorming process to develop solutions to these two problem areas; some actions were written up as ready-to-implement solutions to problems, and other recommended actions specified a need for continued discussion and analysis. The task force continues to operate on its own as several work groups, consisting of general and special educators, both teachers and administrators.

RTI. In Year 1 of RTI's project, the stakeholder group ("advisory/planning panel") developed a district-level vision statement and mission statement for the strategic planning process. The focus was to be on personnel, specifically on improved working conditions and personnel policies. RTI prepared the group for the planning process, developed members' understanding of the purposes and expectations of the group, and facilitated the drafting of a "plan-to-plan."

A major, distinguishing feature of the strategic planning model was termed "environmental scanning," which was initiated in Year 1 and continued throughout the three-year project. This activity assessed factors that would be critical to achieving the stated mission and vision for strategic planning. The identified factors included, among many other things, perceived organizational strengths and weaknesses that would either contribute to or limit the district's ability to attract, retain, and support qualified teachers; the teachers' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and concerns relative to the district's teaching and learning environment; the attitudes of the district's staff, students, parents, and other consumers toward special education, and so forth.

The scan also included the results of the four basic research surveys conducted by RTI. The results of the environmental scan were analyzed collaboratively by the panel and the RTI research team and expressed as a list of 91 statements of problems and opportunities related to enhancing teacher retention in the district. These 91 statements of trends and concerns were classified as 12 topical clusters and, through further analysis, were grouped into nine major problem/opportunity areas. Using Year 1's mission and vision statements as guides, the panel reviewed, discussed, and set priorities for the nine areas; subsequently, the panel agreed that most of the identified trends and concerns could be addressed as *four* strategic issues (School Climate and Conditions; Working Conditions of Personnel in the Schools; Relationships within the School Mainstream Among All

Programs and Personnel; and Personnel Employment, Assignment, and Professional Development Policies and Practices). Each panelist was assigned to one of the four "strategic issue teams," and each team drafted a paper that summarized the issue and specified a related set of goals and outcome objectives. The draft goals and objectives were reviewed by the full panel and revised , and then each team drafted strategies and action steps.

A culminating activity in the strategic planning process was a meeting with 68 selected local stakeholders to review these drafts and specify implementation activities, persons responsible, and time frames. Panel members led and facilitated this special meeting, giving stakeholders an opportunity to buy into and assume ownership of the process. The RTI team then revised the draft strategic plan for the four strategic issue areas. It contains a total of 4 goals, 16 objectives, 32 strategies, and 73 action steps.

SDSU/AIR. A distinguishing feature of the strategic planning process in the SDSU/AIR project was the use of the Electronic Boardroom facilities on the SDSU campus. In a variety of electronically facilitated activities to address findings from data analyses over several stakeholder meetings, the group provided input on their perceptions of what they believed was going on and reasons for the existence of the situation. Electronic tools facilitated group brainstorming to identify action steps which, if taken, would improve the situation (address the reasons given). Other tools enabled them to sort the resulting sets of actions, to formulate more inclusive action statements, and to sort these according to importance, potential for impact, feasibility, appropriateness, etc. Electronic "voting" for the most valued goals, objectives, strategic activities, and specific activities/tasks produced the building blocks for the strategic planning document that was the ultimate achievement of the stakeholder group process.

These statewide stakeholders' meetings always began with a late afternoon-evening meeting at which the SDSU/AIR team reported on project activities and presented results of updated analyses that were relevant to the next day's strategic planning activities. Written and graphical summaries of these highlights were included in participants' conference packets. This material was jointly discussed and interpreted by the stakeholders and the researchers. Stakeholders were prompted to react to the information from the perspectives of the groups they represented, and clarification was provided by the research team. Over the course of the three-year project, the stakeholders' interest in the study findings steadily grew, particularly as a clearer picture emerged of the mobility patterns of the state's educators, the dramatic attrition rates for special educators compared to general educators, and the factors most significantly related to dissatisfaction and decisions to leave special education teaching positions in the San Diego and San Jose school districts. The

stakeholders' interpretations of study findings became increasingly insightful, and their statements were instructive to the research team.

The nature of the data analyses in the SDSU/AIR project allowed major strategic planning areas to emerge from the surveys of current and former special education teachers in the two school districts. For example, factorial analyses and comparisons of data for "stayers" and "leavers" revealed major clusters of variables related to five target areas: (1) Working Conditions and School Climate; (2) Relationships with Other Teachers At School Site; (3) Relationships with School Administrators; (4) Support, Appreciation, and Participation from Parents; and (5) Inclusive Education Practices and Policies.

How Things Were Left

ERI reports that the SCU task force, prior to adjourning, made several closing recommendations to the special education director regarding next steps, and asked that the task force be kept updated regarding the implementation of the strategic action plan. The group also urged the director to inform the entire *faculty* of the work of the task force and to update *them* on any actions taken by the district as a result. The district committed to convening several groups, beginning in the Spring of 1995, to work further on the issues that the task force had identified. Each task force member was invited to join one or more of these groups. A report summarizing project findings was sent to *all* teachers who participated in the study.

RTI provided the MCS with both a hard copy and a camera-ready copy of the individual reports of four major studies in the MCS that had supported the strategic planning process, along with the final report and executive summary, and the Strategic Plan. RTI recommended that the MCS use the camera-ready copy to reproduce and distribute the executive summary and the Strategic Plan to each of the 68 stakeholders who had participated in the final planning meeting, and that the executive summary also be distributed to members of the MCS Board of Education. In January of 1995, the Strategic Plan was formally submitted to the MCS superintendent, who has given all participants assurances that its recommendations will generally be adopted.

The SDSU/AIR project does not close until June 30, 1995, at which time the state-level strategic planning will be completed as will the district-level strategic planning in the San Diego Unified School District. During the 1994-95 academic year in the San Jose Unified School District, changes occurred in administrative personnel at four levels: superintendent, associate superintendent for curriculum, director of special education, and

several special education program administrators. These new leaders have needed to investigate the potential usefulness of the strategic planning activity around issues of special education teacher satisfaction, retention, and attrition, and to do so within the context of the many other challenges they have faced as newly appointed administrators. For this reason, by the close of the current project, only the initial stage of strategic planning will have been completed in the SJUSD.

Conclusions

ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR were gratified by the enthusiasm and support of their respective stakeholder groups, and the quality of their participation in strategic planning activities. In all three projects, the stakeholder groups conveyed the perception that the process had raised their consciousness, based on research findings obtained in their participating school districts. It was apparent that the efforts that the three research teams made to integrate their study findings into stakeholder dialogue had also instilled in the stakeholders an appreciation of the value of a data-based approach to strategic decision making.

On the other hand, broad-based support established during the strategic planning process, and assurances that recommendations will be seriously considered, are necessary but insufficient evidence with which to claim *impact* on the teaching and learning environments of the four participating districts. While strategic planning lays the groundwork for change by targeting strategic actions that could be taken, it stops short of the adaptation of recommendations to suit the *specific sites* where actions are to be implemented, and it stops short of the installation of change and the evaluation of *outcomes*. Given the mutually supportive findings from the ERI, RTI, and SDSU/AIR studies, target outcomes might be conceptualized in terms of changes in teacher perceptions of their working conditions and/or support, variables known to affect the satisfaction and retention of special education teachers and, ultimately, the quality of education provided to students with disabilities.

THE THREE CASE STUDIES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

CASE STUDY 1. Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Silver City Unified School District (SCU) with the Eugene Research Institute (ERI)

CASE STUDY 2. Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Memphis City Schools (MCS) with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI)

CASE STUDY 3. Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts (SDUSD, SJUSD) with San Diego State University (SDSU) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Case Study #1
Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Silver City Unified School District with the Eugene Research Institute (ERI)

Demographic and Contextual Factors

The Silver City Unified School District (SCU) spans a geographic area of 228 square miles and has jurisdiction over 74 elementary schools; 18 middle schools; 10 high schools; and 2 special schools. Of the 3,373 teachers employed in the district, 371 are special education teachers. Of the total district enrollment of 60,000 students, 2,100 are in the special education program. The ethnicity of the total student enrollment is 50% Caucasian, 34% Hispanic, 8% Native American, and 8% African American.

In the third year of ERI's involvement with SCU, the district began an "improvement" initiative that included a special education teacher retention objective. This provided a positive context for the strategic planning process and lent it saliency.

Composition of the Strategic Planning Team

When the study began, a 16-member advisory panel was established to assist ERI in planning and designing the research studies to be conducted. Representatives included a mix of central office and building level administration. Over the course of the three-year project, this group served to inform ERI on issues of concern to district personnel, as well as provide extensive input into instrumentation for the research studies.

For the actual strategic action plan, the district's special education director and ERI staff selected 12 professionals from the district, including the special education director, the human resources director for bilingual and special education, both regional directors of special education, and a selection of program specialists, special education teachers, and building administrators who were both former special education teachers. Many of these individuals had also served on the advisory panel.

The Planning Approach and Process

Two distinctive features of the planning approach taken by ERI were:

- dissemination of research findings, not only to administrators, but also to all teachers who participated in the ERI studies; and

- the creation of a structure for joint planning and decision making, including both teachers administrators, which would continue to address concerns after completion of the research project.

ERI staff met with members of the advisory panel five times over the course of three years: twice in Year 1, once in Year two, and two times in Year 3. There were an additional three intensive strategic planning sessions with the task force which took place at the end of Year 3.

Meetings #1 and #2

During the project's first year, ERI staff met twice with the advisory panel. These meetings provided opportunities to discuss the project in detail and begin building working relationships with key district staff. Data were gathered regarding district organization, service options, and teacher concerns. The group provided extensive input survey content. Advisory group involvement served to enhance district-level relevance of the data and to develop stronger ties for future planning.

Meeting #3

ERI staff met again in Year 2 with members of the advisory panel to present a report of survey findings and attrition rates, obtain reactions, and continue discussion of the relevance of data for strategic planning. The meeting provided more opportunities to discuss aspects of district operation and issues of concern to district personnel.

Meeting #4

Early in the third year, 15 hours of meetings were conducted between project staff and the special education director. Topics included: how strategic action planning related to special education teacher retention and fit into overall district objectives; prior attempts to address work place problems and issues; major barriers to change as viewed from the perspective of the administration; and the importance of involving the teachers union in the planning process.

Meeting #5

ERI staff met with a task force of members of the advisory panel: the director of special education and pupil services; the assistant directors of the two regional service centers; the assistant directors for bilingual and special education and special education personnel; and a member of the district's department of research and evaluation. ERI shared findings from the interview study with the group and obtained their reactions. Administrative questions, explanations, and concerns were incorporated in revisions of the report, and disseminated at subsequent strategic planning meetings (below).

Meetings #6, #7, and #8

At these intensive strategic action planning sessions, the SCU task force met with ERI project staff and a professional facilitator. The three sessions were spread over a three-month period in the final year of the project. The planning process was semi-structured, with ERI providing a basic planning format to follow while allowing for the task force to shape or alter the process as it went along. ERI's role included providing relevant information gained from roughly *200 hours of in-depth interviews with teachers*, facilitating the process with the assistance of a professional facilitator, and feeding information from previous meetings and interim evaluations back to the group between sessions. The task force was responsible for identifying the issues that were most pressing to them, developing the plan, and setting its future direction.

The first of these final three meetings of the task force focused on presentation and discussion of ERI's study findings. For each major finding, the group was given an opportunity to raise questions, provide additional information, and debate the issues. Through this process, alternate perspectives were considered and the group's understanding of the issues was expanded.

Next, the group undertook the issue-identification phase of the process. Each participant was asked to identify and share what they viewed as the three most pressing issues related to recruiting and retaining quality special education teachers in the district. Group members were encouraged to draw from the day's discussion, as well as from their own experiences, in completing this activity.

Each issue was written on an index card, passed to the front of the room, and displayed for group consideration. The issues were then discussed by the task force and grouped thematically through a collaborative process.

Close to 20 issues were identified which were organized into the following five broad categories: (1) Developing A Common Focus Between Special and General Education; (2) Work Environment; (3) Balancing the Workload; (4) Professional Development Opportunities; and (5) Funding. Most issues identified were not unique to special education; they were larger organizational issues.

Two final meetings were convened to clarify issues and generate action steps to address the problem areas they had identified within the five strategic planning categories, above. This was largely a brainstorming process where all ideas were heard and documented. Some actions were written up as ready-made solutions to problems. Others specified a need for continued discussion and analysis.

Examples of Action Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

In total, 152 action recommendations were made during the strategic action planning. The group focused most of its energy on developing plans for improving teachers' working environments and workload manageability, because these areas were considered most pressing *and* amenable to concerted action. The following summarizes a selection of action recommendations:

- *Collegial support systems for teachers.* The task force felt strongly that teachers needed more opportunities for *substantive* collegial interaction to help them manage changes that were taking place in their work, and to facilitate professional development. From the extensive and lengthy discussions that took place on this topic, several concerns, ideas, and recommendations emerged. The group was highly responsive to the fact that teachers are growing increasingly frustrated with traditionally structured inservice training that does not seem to address their specific concerns or needs. The group strongly recommended that teachers be given a primary role in developing and running collegial meetings to ensure that they are based on what teachers have stated that they want and need. Two types of collegial support systems were recommended:

  Monthly study groups. Small, voluntary groups of teachers from across the district to get together on a monthly basis to study/discuss areas of interest to the group. A teacher leader would run meetings. The group would set the topic. Guest speakers would be invited. The group recommended that the special education director request a credit opportunity for teachers who

participate in these study groups.

Peer support network. The group recommended setting up an information network so that teachers could easily reach one another when they needed specific technical assistance or advice. The establishment of such a network would require: a staff survey to determine areas within which teachers would be willing to provide technical assistance; and development of a database with teachers' phone numbers. The group recommended that a task force be assigned to further discuss and ultimately develop this network.

It was further recommended that a group be established to continue to explore and develop ways to provide increased opportunities for teachers to get together to share what they are doing. The emphasis would be on ways to communicate and share models for effective practice and to build teacher networks.

- *Opening up communication between the central office and the teaching staff.* Another major issue addressed at length relates to improving communication between special education teachers and the central office administration. The task force was concerned primarily with establishing *permanent* systems for information exchange *between* the parties. The majority of recommendations focused on establishing and making good use of teacher advisory groups to provide greater levels of teacher input to the central office. *Extensive discussion also occurred regarding the importance of involving teachers in making decisions that directly affect their work.* Also discussed at length was the circumstance in which decisions are made that are beyond the control of teachers and central office, and the importance of open communication and providing opportunities for teachers to raise questions and concerns.

How Things Were Left

The task force, prior to adjourning, made several closing recommendations to the special education director regarding next steps. The group asked to be kept informed and updated regarding the implementation of the action plan. The group also urged the director to inform the entire faculty of the work of the task force and to update them on any actions taken by the district as a result. The district committed to convening several groups, beginning in the Spring of 1995, to work further on the issues that the task force had identified. Each task force member was invited to join one or more of these groups. A report summarizing project findings was sent to *all* teachers who participated in the study.

ERI's Conclusions About Outcomes of the Strategic Planning Process

Overall, the issues taken on by the task force were in many ways consistent with the issues raised by the special education teachers who were surveyed and interviewed in the study. Clearly, however, the impact that the action recommendations will have on change and resolution of these issues is yet to be determined. Minimally, awareness and understanding of issues faced by the special education teachers working in this district have been heightened, and a process for developing and implementing a plan for resolving them has begun.

Case Study #2
Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention in the Memphis City Schools with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI)

Demographic and Contextual Factors

The Memphis City School system (MCS) serves the city of Memphis, which has a population of 640,000 and is the 18th largest city in the nation (USA Today, June 14, 1991). The population of Memphis is 55 percent Black and 45 percent White, and the racial composition of the students in the MCS is 80 percent Black and 20 percent White. The MCS is a member of the Council of Great City Schools and is the 15th largest school district in the nation. It has 163 schools, employs a total of 5,225 teachers (627 of whom are special education teachers, and serves 107,819 students in grades K-12.

Providing a complementary backdrop for the project's strategic planning process were the Board of Education's *Vision 2000: Strategic Plan for Memphis City Schools*, as well as several other initiatives and future plans of the MCS central administration in school redesign and restructuring.

Composition of the Strategic Planning Team

At the initiation of the study, a 13-member Advisory/Planning Panel was selected to serve throughout the life of the study. In Year 1 of the project, this group was referred to as the Advisory/Planning Panel because its responsibilities extended beyond strategic planning, i.e., to include advising the RTI team on planning and designing the research studies to be conducted in the MCS. The Panel conducted a stakeholder analysis to identify and screen potential candidates to serve on the study's strategic planning team in Years 1 and 2. As a result of the stakeholder analysis, the Panel recommended that its own members act as the strategic planning team, with the addition of six other persons to broaden the representation of parents, principals, and MCS supervisors of general and special education programs. These recommendations were accepted and in Year 2 the Panel was expanded to 19 members. In Year 3, two more persons were added, resulting in a 21-member Panel that represented major MCS stakeholders as follows: associate superintendent of student programs and services, director of special education, 2 special education supervisors, 3 elementary school principals, a junior high school principal, 2 high school special education teachers (one of whom also represented the Memphis Education Association), an elementary school special education teacher, 2 general education

supervisor, a high school general education teacher, 2 parents, the special education department chairperson at the state university, a representative from the special education division of the state department of education, and 3 external consultants with expertise in strategic planning, personnel supply/demand issues, and special education teacher preparation.

The Planning Approach and Process

The Panel/Strategic Planning Team met ten times during the course of the three-year study--twice in each of Years 1 and 2 and six times in Year 3. Between meetings, individual members led/held small group work sessions with local stakeholders to obtain input for developing action plans for the strategies formulated by the team at large. All planning meetings and small group work sessions were held in Memphis. These meetings were facilitated by the RTI research team and were chaired by a member of the Memphis team.

In the first Panel meeting, the RTI research team established a firm foundation for the planning process by providing Panel members with an understanding of the strategic planning process and the purposes and expectations of the Panel. Time lines and decision rules were established, related vision and mission statements were drafted, a plan-to-plan was developed, and the process of scanning the environment for trends, threats, and opportunities that influence the achievement of the goals underlying the draft mission statement was initiated.

The strategic planning process was implemented in seven steps:

1 *Obtain the superintendent's commitment and support.* The MCS superintendent committed to the study before it was initiated. As the study progressed, the superintendent was periodically briefed on the study's status and given an opportunity to review and react to drafts of such key study materials as survey plans and questionnaires, vision and mission statements, the strategic action plan, and the final report of study findings.

2 *Involve and collaborate with stakeholders.* Ongoing collaboration between researchers and practitioners was emphasized, and the above group of key stakeholders were involved in all aspects of the process--from the identification of educational issues and problems through the development of the final strategic action plan. This step promoted community support to help ensure the usefulness,

acceptance, and implementation of the strategic action plan.

3 *Develop related vision and mission statements.* In Year 1, the Panel developed district-level vision and mission statements to guide the planning process. The vision statement sets forth the desired future for the MCS. The mission statement focuses on personnel, and on improved conditions and policies involving personnel, that will contribute to achieving the overall vision for the schools.

4 *Conduct environmental scanning.* The environment within which the MCS special education program is operating was "scanned" in order to build a well-grounded knowledge base and identify key factors, trends, and/or events that could affect attainment of the vision for the MCS special education program and fulfillment of the program's mission. This scan assessed such critical success factors as:

- The organizational structure of the MCS and its special education program.
- The MCS's strengths and weaknesses related to the stated vision and mission (i.e., those factors that would either contribute to or limit the district's ability to attract, retain, and support qualified special and general education teachers), and the teachers' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and concerns relative to the MCS' teaching and learning environment.
- State and local philosophies, values, political considerations, and general economic conditions.
- The attitudes of the district's staff, students, parents, and other consumers toward special education.
- General external forces over which the school district has little or no control but that impact on the educational program, e.g., geographic location and changes in (1) state and/or federal policies related to special education, (2) training, certifying, and licensing teachers, and (3) social values in society.

The environmental scan also included the results of the four research studies conducted by RTI in the MCS and reported elsewhere; in general, these studies explored special and general education teachers' attitudes about, and perceptions of, the MCS teaching and learning environment. The findings of the research surveys were presented to, and interpreted for, the Panel, which in turn incorporated them in the environmental scan. Scanning was a continuing process

throughout the three-year study. As additional scanning information was gathered and reviewed, it was organized and incorporated into an "updated" scanning summary.

5 *Identify problems, barriers, and opportunities.* The results of the environmental scan were analyzed by the Panel and RTI research team and expressed as a list of 91 statements of problems/opportunities related to enhancing teacher retention in the MCS. These 91 statements of trends and concerns were classified as 12 topical clusters: (1) positive trends, including developments underway in MCS while this project was taking place; (2) personnel at risk, which refers to levels of attrition, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among specific types of personnel; (3) quality of personnel; (4) teaching conditions; (5) school climate and conditions; (6) relationships within the school mainstream; (7) inclusive education, i.e., the integration of students with special needs into general education and activities of the school; (8) bureaucratic requirements and central office issues; (9) teacher hiring and assignment practices; (10) the supply of new personnel; (11) continuing professional development; and (12) long-term planning.

6 *Identify and select strategic issues.* Through further analysis, most of these 91 problem/opportunity statements were grouped into nine major problem/opportunity areas. Using the vision and mission statements as a guide, the Panel reviewed, discussed, and prioritized these nine areas in terms of their perceived importance in maintaining the district's vision and fulfilling its mission. These nine areas, in *descending* order of importance, are: (1) teaching conditions; (2) school climate and conditions; (3) relationships with the school mainstream; (4) teacher hiring and assignment practices; (5) continuing professional development; (6) inclusive education; (7) bureaucratic requirements and central office issues; (8) supply of new personnel; and (9) long-term planning.

Subsequently, the Panel agreed that most of the identified trends and concerns could be addressed as four strategic issues: (1) school climate and conditions; (2) working conditions of personnel in the schools; (3) relationships within the school mainstream among all programs and personnel; and (4) personnel employment, assignment, and professional development policies and practices. These four strategic issues covered all but 12 of the 91 original problem or opportunity areas.

7 *Develop goals, objectives, strategies, and action steps for strategic issues.* Each panelist was assigned to one of four "strategic issue teams", and each team drafted a paper

that summarized the strategic issue and specified a related set of goals and outcome objectives. These drafts were reviewed by the full Panel and revised accordingly.

Working with the revised goal statements and objectives, each team drafted strategies and action steps for achieving the objectives. The full Panel then reviewed and revised these strategies and action steps, with an emphasis on removing redundancies or inconsistencies across the four issues.

In November 1994, the Panel met with 68 selected local stakeholders to review the draft strategic action plan and help specify implementation activities, identify the persons to authorize and implement each activity, and develop implementation time frames. Panel members served as leaders and facilitators for this special meeting. This meeting gave these stakeholders an opportunity to "buy into" and assume ownership of the process.

Using the input obtained from the 68 stakeholders, the RTI research team revised the draft strategic plan and resubmitted it to the stakeholders and panelists for final review. The revised plan specified goals, objectives, strategies, and action steps for each of the four strategic issues. For each action step, it specified implementation activities, the names and/or titles of those responsible for authorization and implementation, and implementation time frames.[2] The 75-page plan contains a total of 4 goals, 16 objectives, 32 strategies, and 73 action steps in the plan. It also includes references to the continuation of certain activities that were initiated by MCS while this project was evolving.

Feedback from the stakeholder review was incorporated in the final strategic action plan, which is entitled *Strategic Plan for Personnel Recruitment, Retention, and Professional Development.*

Examples of Action Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

The 75-page Strategic Plan presents in detailed outline format the goals, objectives, major strategies, and actions steps for each of the above four strategic targets: School Climate and Conditions; Working Conditions of Personnel in the Schools; Relationships Within the School Mainstream Among All Programs And Personnel; and Personnel

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[2] For some of the action steps, the Panel was not able to specify the names of key participants and start/completion dates. It is anticipated that the MCS will make these determinations as the plan is implemented.

Employment, Assignment, and Professional Development Policies and Practices. Included for each *action step* are: statements of specific implementation activities; the names and/or titles of those responsible for authorization and implementation; and implementation time frames. Below is an illustrative excerpt for the first of several objectives covered under the *School Climate and Conditions* target area.

A. School Climate and Conditions

Goal A: To improve the school climate for general and special education teachers in the MCS system.

Objective A-1: To increase parental involvement.

Strategy A-1-1: Enlist parents to serve in school-related activities, by encouraging principals to take the following steps.

A-1-1-1: Appoint parents to committees and enlist them as volunteers.

1. Establish a Special Education Parent Support Group at the school level (with ties to the Parent Advisory Board).

2. Appoint a Parent Liaison to work with all families of students enrolled in each school.

3. Encourage principals to make parents and teachers of special education students, and the students themselves, part of the total school program.

4. Ask parents to complete a school volunteer form at registration.

Authorization: MCS Superintendent; school principals

Persons responsible for implementation: Each school principal (leader) and guidance counselor; special education teachers; general education teachers.

Other key participants: Director of the Division of Youth and Family Services; parents

Resources: The W. D. Callian Parenting Center; MCS

Teaching/Learning Academy; Parent Liaisons with the MCS Division of Exceptional Children

Start Date: September 1995

Completion Date: Ongoing activities but deadlines should be set for putting activities in place.

How Things Were Left

Effective dissemination between researchers, practitioners, and other key stakeholders was emphasized throughout the project's duration to keep everyone informed about the study's purpose, objectives, status, outcomes, and opportunities for collaboration. However, the major dissemination effort was in the last year of the study as final results became available. RTI provided the MCS with both a hard copy and a camera-ready copy of the individual reports of four major studies in the MCS that had supported the strategic planning process, the final report and executive summary, and the Strategic Plan. RTI recommended that the MCS use the camera-ready copy to reproduce and distribute copies of the executive summary and the Strategic Plan to each of the 68 stakeholders who participated in the final planning meeting, and that the executive summary also be distributed to members of the MCS Board of Education. RTI also recommended that the MCS make copies of the full report available to those Board members who want more information about the study's methodology and findings.

In January 1995, the Strategic Plan was formally submitted to the MCS superintendent, who has given all participants assurances that its recommendations will generally be adopted.

RTI's Conclusions About Outcomes of the Strategic Planning Process

The quality of the Strategic Plan and the enthusiasm and support of the local participants greatly exceeded the expectations that the RTI research team had "going into the study." This was due primarily to the support and leadership of the MCS superintendent and administrative staff, and the willingness of key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parents, principals, program supervisors, Memphis State University staff, Tennessee State Department of Education personnel) to support and get actively involved in the planning process.

RTI and MCS concurred that the development of the Strategic Plan and its submission to the MCS administration was a major step toward improving the teaching and learning environment in the MCS. However, although the process of developing the plan may have challenged or changed the way MCS policymakers and practitioners identified and viewed problems, the full impact of the plan cannot be realized unless it is implemented. The ultimate measure of its quality is the impact that its implementation has on the MCS teaching and learning environment.

One of the recommendations in the strategic action plan was for the MCS to establish a permanent Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Council for the district. This Council would have responsibility for participatory planning to ensure that the following features of the CSPD are carried out: collaboration; needs assessment; preservice; continuing education for all personnel, including parents; dissemination of promising practices; technical assistance; evaluation. Given the broad-based support established during the planning process and the assurances of the superintendent that the plan's recommendations will generally be adopted, RTI is hopeful that the plan will be implemented and updated annually, under the oversight of either the current Advisory/Planning Panel or a newly formed CSPD Council.

Case Study #3
Strategic Planning for Teacher Retention
in the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts
with San Diego State University (SDSU) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Demographic and Contextual Factors

Two large, urban, ethnically diverse northern and southern California school districts participated in the SDSU/AIR project. The San Diego Unified School District covers over 200 square miles, has jurisdiction over 156 schools with a total enrollment of 128,000 (13,000 of whom are special education students). The teaching staff numbers 5,750, of whom 850 are special education teachers. The ethnic groups to which students belong are Hispanic (32.6%), White (30.6%), African-American (16.8%), Philippine (8.4%), Indochinese (7.6%), and Asian, Pacific Islander, Alaskan Indian (4.0%) The district teaching force numbers 5,750 (of whom 850 are special education teachers.

The San Jose Unified School district serves an 80 square mile area. There are 42 schools with a total enrollment of 28,436, of whom 2,559 students are in the special education program. The total number of teachers is 1,431, of whom 172 are special education teachers. Data on ethnicity provided by the district indicate that 45.8% of the students are Hispanic, 34.2% are White, 12.6% are Asian, 3.4% are African-American, 2.2% are Pacific Islander/Alaskan Indian/American Indian, and 1.6% are Philippine.

Both districts were impacted by significant turnover in top administrative positions during the course of the project. The most extreme case was the San Jose Unified School District, in which new administrators were appointed at four levels during the last year of the project.

Composition of the Statewide Stakeholder Group

The SDSU/AIR project design required the involvement of stakeholders who represented agencies and groups in a position to recommend and implement policies and practices at both the state and district levels to influence teacher decision making relative to retention and attrition. Approximately 20 individuals were members of this group. *Statewide* representatives included: a member of the state board of education who is also a parent of a child with severe handicaps and who also served on the state advisory commission on special education; a consultant to the state department of education's

special education division who helps schools coordinate policy for general and special education as well as teacher recruitment, retention, and statewide staff development; a special education consultant on the staff of the commission on teacher credentialing, who also provides direction to the establishment and monitoring of university training programs for special educators; a member of the state commission on teacher credentialing, who is also a teacher and program specialist for the San Diego Union High School District, responsible for developing educational programs for special education; four chairpersons of special education departments at state universities, who collectively have held positions in the state association of professors of special education, on the ad hoc committee of special education personnel availability for the state teacher credentialing commission, on the task force on restructuring the special education credential, and on the advisory committee for the state comprehensive system of personnel development; a staff consultant to the state teachers association who was formerly a special education teacher and administrator, and is a member of several statewide advisory bodies including the ad hoc committee on special education personnel availability; two professors in university special education departments, one of whom is also the president of the state federation/council for exceptional children, and the other of whom is co-chairperson of the state comprehensive system of personnel development advisory committee; directors of two county-level special education departments, one of these individuals also being a director of a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) of which there are 116 in California; and a second SELPA director who also chairs the SELPA administrators association, a group that is actively seeks effective responses to the state's shortage of special education teachers.

Representing key stakeholders in the *San Diego Unified School District* were: an assistant superintendent who had held positions in special education administration for several years; two human resources administrators; the director of special education; a program coordinator; and a resource teacher. Representatives for stakeholders in the *San Jose Unified School District* were: the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction; the special education director and one of her program administrators; and the director of certified staffing.

The Planning Approach and Process

The Statewide Stakeholders Committee met six times: once in Year 1, twice in Year 2, and three times in the last year of the project. (Also in the final project year, SDSU met four times with a local policy group of key stakeholders, including administrators and teachers, in the San Diego Unified School District. The purpose of the

first two meetings was team building in preparation for strategic planning by this SDUSD group; the other two meetings focused on the development of strategic action plans based on the respondent data from that district.)

The overall approach taken by SDSU/AIR to capturing the interest of the stakeholders, and equipping them to "own" the strategic planning process had these features:

- use of Electronic Boardroom technology to facilitate brainstorming and consensus building
- providing stakeholders with updates of emerging study findings in a manner that stimulated reflective thinking
- gradually, over the course of the six meetings, moving participants from thinking globally about attrition/retention issues to thinking more specifically, focusing on themes that were emerging from the data obtained in the San Diego and San Jose Unified School Districts
- "recycling" the strategies and actions they had proposed at previous meetings by having them reconsider them in the light of the research team's updated findings and more focused analyses

The summary below attempts to provide a concrete picture of how the Electronic Boardroom facilitated the planning process and how in each of the six meetings, *every* participant incorporated his or her perspective to the creation and refinement of the detailed recommendations that constitute the final Strategic Plan.

The Electronic Boardroom

The Electronic Boardroom facilities on the SDSU campus is a planning and decision-making laboratory that facilitates traditional planning processes in combination with a variety of computer and audio/visual support systems to create a unique meeting environment. Participants sit at networked computer workstations that run special software and use either desktop or laptop computers to facilitate strategic planning. A facilitator combines normal group discussion with "electronic brainstorming." These activities use a variety of tools that facilitate problem identification, generation of problem solutions, organization of ideas, and evaluation and rank-ordering of goals, objectives, strategic approaches, specific activities/tasks proposed by participants. Participants are

anonymous, i.e., it is impossible to determine which individual in the group authored a particular idea in the database that is created during electronic brainstorming. Key advantages to this approach are the flexibility afforded by the software tools that were used to structure group input, and which were mixed and matched to the particular objectives of the meeting. The technology and the process made meetings more productive by reducing counter-productive group interaction and keeping participants on the desired track. Another advantage was the ability to provide participants with printed results of their efforts at the end of each meeting.

Meeting #1

The first meeting of the stakeholders' group was held about six months into Year 1 of the SDSU/AIR project. Its purpose was to engage the stakeholders in helping the researchers set directions for the upcoming studies of special education teacher retention and attrition, and the subsequent strategic planning activities throughout the project. At a dinner meeting preceding the full-day work session, the research team provided the group with an overview of the project purposes, design, and major activities, and oriented them to the objectives of the strategic planning process and the expected role of the stakeholder group in producing recommended actions to be taken by designated entities at state and district levels to strategically address the factors that influence special education teacher retention and attrition. Stakeholders provided input about their backgrounds and the relevance of their perspectives to the strategic planning process.

The following day's meeting was held on the SDSU campus, where stakeholders participated in Electronic Boardroom activities for about three hours; it proved to be a superb technology to facilitate interactions and input from the newly constituted group. A professional facilitator guided them in a sequence of brainstorming exercises which required each stakeholder to provide input via individual computer work stations. In these exercises, they identified the 188 issues that they believed are associated with teacher attrition (statewide and locally), categorized these issues under 12 headings, and rank-ordered the 12 categories. Then they again used the electronic brainstorming technology to propose policy recommendations for addressing the 12 issue areas, and rank-ordered the recommendations within each area. In addition to providing important information on the stakeholders' perspectives to the research team, this sequence of activities provided a preview of how the Electronic Boardroom would be used over the life of the project.

The concluding activity of this initial stakeholder meeting was a roundtable discussion in which each participant described their individual interests in the study, their hopes and expectations for it, and their suggestions relative to project and questionnaire

design. Although a lot of faith was expressed in the value of the study findings as a guide to deciding what strategic actions should be taken, and how to structure these actions, some concerns were expressed relative to the research team's ability "to get at the subtleties" of factors influencing attrition and retention of special educators. The team assured the group that they, as stakeholder representatives, would be reviewing drafts of study instruments and recommending modifications and additions in them at future meetings.

Meeting #2

The second stakeholder meeting was held eight months later (early in Year 2 of the project), by which time the research team could present preliminary results from analyses of several data sets, and distribute copies of the survey instrument which had been refined using stakeholder input from the preceding meeting. At the late afternoon-evening meeting, the research team highlighted preliminary results: the impact of a number of factors on the patterns of statewide teacher mobility which were identified in longitudinal analyses of the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS); reasons for staying in or leaving teaching which were identified in a "critical incident study" of a national sample of current and former special education teachers; and early trends emerging from the telephone interviews in progress with current special education teachers in the two participating school districts.

The next day's work session in the Electronic Boardroom opened with an exercise in which the stakeholders reviewed and revised the potential research questions to be asked relative to the data that were currently being collected. The printout of their deliberations showed how they consolidated, augmented, and refined the questions they wanted the research to address, and listed the 38 questions in the resulting set in order of importance, based on electronic voting by the stakeholders. Many of the 38 questions addressed aspects of "job satisfaction's relationship to various kinds of teacher support." (Subsequently, the research team used the list to plan further data analyses.)

In the next electronic exercise, the group proposed strategic actions to address specific variables that the preliminary analysis of the San Diego and San Jose survey data suggested were significant: formal mentoring by a mentor teacher; direct assistance from the site principal; informal mentoring by special education colleagues; assistance in developing IEPs; adequacy of instructional materials and supplies provided to teachers; quality of support received from site administrators relative to behavior problems. For each of these factors, the stakeholders used their computer terminals to "forecast" what would need to be done, who would need to do it, what it would take to do it, and how feasible it is to do it. The aim of the exercise was to facilitate reflective thinking by the

stakeholders about these possible strategic targets. The group then used a 3-step Likert-scale process to rate electronically the importance, likely influence on policy, and feasibility of each of the proposed strategic actions. The computer printout listed the strategies they judged to be most important, promising, and feasible.

In the afternoon's concluding discussion, stakeholders indicated the kinds of data summaries they would find most useful, and the research team took these preferences into account in preparing summaries for future meetings.

Meeting #3

The third stakeholder meeting was held about midway through Year 2, by which time the telephone survey of current special education teachers in the two participating districts was 80% complete and the database represented about 400 special education teachers. At the late afternoon-evening briefing of stakeholders, the research team presented results from further CBEDS analyses of the statewide mobility patterns and characteristics of special and general educators over a five year period. They also presented statistically significant findings from the nearly-complete survey of current special education teachers. To increase the salience of the presentation for the next day's strategic planning work session, the survey results were organized by the same topical areas and variable clusters to be used for the electronic brainstorming activities. One major set of variables was related to the *changing roles* of special educators; the second major set of variables was related to teacher *support*. Stakeholders were provided with 13 user-friendly tables that enabled them to scan lists of variables that were relevant to 9 aspects of support and 4 aspects of changing roles, and to compare the results for each of the two school districts. The stakeholders responded enthusiastically, engaging the research team in extensive discussion for the remainder of the afternoon-evening meeting.

Heretofore, the group's strategic planning sessions had been exploratory and hypothetical, because study data were quite preliminary. Now, results of the nearly completed survey of current special education teachers were expected to remain stable, and strategic planning would be grounded in reality. In the next day's Electronic Boardroom session, the stakeholders spent the entire day in computer-based strategic planning activities to identify actions that can be taken by state agencies, policy makers, and local educational agencies to address the variables the study findings determined to be critical to teacher satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with regard to the various aspects of their changing roles and support. To facilitate reflective thinking, these two major topical areas were further divided into four strategic planning targets that were consistent with study findings that had been presented the preceding evening: teacher feelings about their changing

roles: teacher perceptions relative to special education/general education interactions (both general education teachers and administrators); teacher perceptions of training support and needs; and teacher perceptions in terms of supervisor support and assistance. Taking one area at a time, and encouraged to refer to the 13 data tables from the prior evening's presentation, the stakeholders used their computer terminals to input proposed actions that should be taken by state agencies/policy makers and by local educational agencies. Then they rated each action relative to its feasibility and expected impact.

The computer printouts of the group's work listed the proposed actions for each stakeholder level (state/policy maker, local/district) for each of the four strategic target areas; and the recommended actions according to their rank-order score for impact/feasibility. In the concluding computer-based activity, stakeholders were asked to consider what had been discussed and generated so far, and to suggest additional issues or topics to probe during the upcoming interviews with individuals who had *left* special education teaching in the two districts. They generated a list of 72 questions and sorted them into 15 clusters; these data were subsequently used by the research team to refine the draft "exiter questionnaire."

Meeting #4

The fourth meeting occurred at the beginning of Year 3, when preliminary results of the "exiter survey" were available for approximately 200 individuals who had left their teaching positions in the SDUSD or the SJUSD between 1990-93. At the opening afternoon-evening session, the retention/attrition comparisons for leavers and stayers were presented to the stakeholder group in a variety of formats, including bar charts, data tables, and lists of especially significant findings regarding factors that were shown to be important in decisions to leave the profession, to contribute to satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and that distinguished leavers from stayers. Of special interest to stakeholders were results of a comparison of the data collected from the group of 451 teachers who were teaching in 1992-93, and the data collected from 224 teachers who had left their special education teaching positions in the two districts during the period 1990-93. This analysis identified 46 survey items in which it was found that there were *statistically significant differences between the responses of stayers and leavers.* The stakeholders were provided with a summary listing of the items, clustered under five potential target areas for strategic planning activities: (1) site level administrative support; (2) support and recognition from general and special education teachers and central office special education staff; (3) working conditions and school climate; (4) support, appreciation, and participation from parents; and (5) appropriate pre-service preparation and continuing professional development. The summary indicated which statistical differences were applicable to both school districts, to

the San Diego district only, or to the San Jose district only. Another summary in which the stakeholders were keenly interested presented the open-ended responses to survey items that asked why the (leavers) had left teaching, what would make them (leavers) want to return to teaching special education in the district, and what things they (stayers and leavers) had liked best (and disliked most) about their special education teaching position.

Most of the next day's Electronic Boardroom session dealt with the first three of the above five issue areas. The same sequence of activities was followed for each area. First, the research team reviewed with the group the relevant research (charts, graphs, lists of findings) from the prior evening's presentation of findings for that area. Second, the facilitator guided a computer-based activity that addressed the question, "Why might this be happening?" The stakeholders input their perceptions of what they believed was going on, and then the facilitator helped the group classify their responses (reasons for the existence of the situation). An example of a classification under the area of Site Level Administrative Support was *"Principals' lack of knowledge/understanding of the special education program."* There were several subordinate reasons clustered under this category, including *"The principal sees the special ed tchr as the specially trained expert."* Next, for the same issue area, the stakeholders electronically brainstormed action steps which, if taken, would improve the situation (address the reasons given). The facilitator led the group in sorting the resulting set of actions, developing for each cluster a statement that captured the subordinate action statements. An example of one such inclusive action statement was *"Provide inservice for the administrators."* Finally, each stakeholder electronically voted for six of the action steps they believed would be most effective. The resulting printout listed the six action steps for this issue area that the group had scored highest, sorted by rank sum. The same sequence of activities, undertaken for the second and third issue areas, above, extended the stakeholders' opportunity to reflect on the findings and to address them directly with reasoned action proposals.

Concluding activities of the day used the electronic technology to facilitate the group's formulation of a vision statement, a mission statement, and statements of goals/objectives the group wanted to achieve relative to its vision and mission. As an example of the efficiency of the computer-based group process, the stakeholders formulated and reached consensus on both statements within 45 minutes. The vision statement was *"To provide special education students with the most effective education for satisfying and productive lives."* The mission statement was *"To achieve our vision by promoting the best possible training and support of all educators, thus increasing their professional success, pride, and satisfaction."* Examples of two of the goals/objectives for the vision and mission statements were "Implement effective training programs for teachers and administrators" and "Infuse project data (from the SDSU/AIR study) into the

knowledge base of administrators and teachers." The mission and vision statements would guide the group's development of a strategic planning document in the fifth and sixth stakeholder meetings.

Meetings #5 and #6

The fifth and sixth stakeholder meetings were held within about three weeks of each other, utilized the same research summaries, and followed the same sequence of technology-assisted activities to draft a strategic planning document that responded to major study findings under five topic areas: (1) Working Conditions and School Climate; (2) Relationships with Other Teachers At School Site; (3) Relationships with School Administrators; (4) Support, Appreciation, and Participation from Parents; and (5) Inclusive Education Practices and Policies. For each of these target areas, the following sequence of activities was completed to produce that component of the strategic plan. First, the research team reviewed the major study findings for the area. Second, the stakeholders used their computer terminals to propose and vote on goals and objectives to be met by improving policies and practices in the target area. Third, they input their proposals for strategic actions and examples of subordinate activities/tasks (for each strategic action) that should be taken *by each of ten* specified stakeholder groups: State Department of Education, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, State School Board, Advisory Commission on Special Education, California Federation of Teachers/California Teachers Association, the school districts, individual school sites, institutions of higher education (teacher preparation programs), professional organizations (e.g., CEC, CAPSE), and the SELPA Directors/County Offices of Education.

To support this ambitious agenda within the time constraints of these last two strategic planning meetings, the facilitator led the group in the sorts of electronic brainstorming, sorting, voting, and refining activities with which they had become familiar in the four prior stakeholder meetings. In addition, the research team provided the group with supporting material to scan during the electronic exercises. These included summary lists of the objectives, actions, activities, and recommendations they had generated at prior meetings -- these capsule summaries were organized by the same five target areas on which the strategic planning sessions were to focus. In addition, the stakeholders were given a summary of major findings from a special analysis of the *areas associated with special education teacher dissatisfaction reported by leavers and probable leavers;* these findings were listed as statements of their major concerns, and grouped by topic under each of the five target areas. They included only those factors that clustered statistically, i.e., on which leavers and stayers differed significantly. The factors represented one-third of the total items on the survey instrument. The facilitator and the researchers coached the

stakeholders to discriminate between goals and objectives, and between strategic approaches and specific activities/tasks, in the ideas that they contributed in the electronic process.

The computer-based product from the strategic planning process was literally produced in these last two meetings, namely, a draft *Strategic Plan for Addressing Issues Relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction/Retention/Attrition.* In an outline format it presented the vision statement, mission statement, and the goals, objectives, and recommended strategic actions for each of the five target areas. Within each target area, the outline first presented a goal statement. That was followed by statements of objectives; under each objective were the ten stakeholder groups, each followed by a list of strategic actions (and subordinate activities/tasks for many of these) the group recommended. Thus the document presented five coordinated plans, each representing an inclusive and concerted effort to meet the stated goals and objectives for improvements in the target area.

The computer-based product was prepared as a formal draft strategic plan and submitted to validation reviews by the stakeholders and by additional policy makers for whom strategic roles in achieving the goals and objectives were recommended. Reviewers were asked to comment on the appropriateness and feasibility of the subsets of strategic actions, and the subordinate activities/tasks, that the plan designated for their particular entity. In addition, members of the stakeholder group were asked to recommend editorial changes in the substance and wording of the document. Reviewers were asked to provide reasons for their suggestions, e.g., "Not possible for this group," "This is an activity, not a strategy," "Not of sufficient importance," and so on.

Examples of Action Recommendations in the Strategic Plan

The following excerpt from the draft Strategic Plan is for the first of the five topic areas. The example lists the relevant goal and all subordinate objectives. For one of those objectives, the strategic actions for each of ten stakeholder groups are listed to illustrate the manner in which all of these groups would need to pull together to guarantee a strong, effective response to the problem area addressed by that objective.

Topic #1: Working Conditions/School Climate and Job Design

Goal: Improve daily working conditions, school climate, and job design for purposes of increasing special education teacher satisfaction.

Objective 1-A:	Promote increased administrative support and responsiveness to staff needs.
Objective 1-B:	Increase professional autonomy.
Objective 1-C:	Provide adequate material resources to teachers.
Objective 1-D:	Increase opportunities for professional growth of special education teachers.

As an example, here are the strategic actions under Objective 1-C that were recommended by the stakeholder committee for each of ten key groups.

Objective 1-C: Provide adequate material resources to teachers.

Strategic Actions:

California Department of Education

1. Develop mechanisms for funding local curriculum acquisition efforts.
2. Create ways to provide bulk purchases for reduced rates.
3. Disseminate information on effective instructional materials/programs through newsletters and other publications.
4. Develop a strategic plan relative to special education teacher attrition.

Commission on Teacher Credentialing

1. Ensure that selection and evaluation of instructional/materials and programs for use with students with special needs is addressed in all teacher credential programs.

State Board of Education

1. Appoint special education experts to each curriculum area on the Curriculum Commission for the state.
2. Identify/disseminate criteria for evaluating effectiveness of educational materials in relationship to special education.

Advisory Commission on Special Education

1. Study ways of utilizing resources efficiently and effectively, and ways of increasing resources; make recommendations.
2. Promote the establishment of criteria for evaluating effectiveness of educational materials in relationship to special education.
3. Create a committee to make recommendations on meeting resource needs of special education teachers.

California Teachers Association

1. Establish professional standards on selection of materials relative to identified indices of their effectiveness.
2. Ensure that special education needs are represented on professional resource committees of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC).

Local School Districts

1. Include special education staff in all curriculum selection/dissemination.
2. Develop a materials needs assessment for teachers; inventory materials at each site.
3. Establish guidelines for allocations of materials budgets for *all* teachers, including special education.
4. Use district mentor teacher network to help new teachers find resources.
5. Allow teachers to pool their budgets to buy materials to share.
6. Provide central materials/text/etc. resource center that includes exemplary materials, including those that address special needs (LEP, etc.)

Individual School Sites

1. Provide same level (funding, quality, adequate supply) of texts, workbooks, etc., for general education and special education.
2. Provide adequate classroom materials to support new special education programs on site.
3. Ensure access to general education materials for special education teachers.
4. Provide training for both general and special education on addressing needs of special education and other students at risk for academic failure.

Institutions of Higher Education (Teacher Preparation Programs)

1. Utilize existing mechanisms (e.g., district newsletters) for recommending proven instructional materials.
2. Provide preservice and inservice instruction on evaluating and selecting materials relative to available evidence on their effectiveness in addressing specific needs.

Professional Special Education Organizations (CEC, CAPSE, etc.)

1. Conduct workshops on how to select instructional materials.
2. Establish/disseminate criteria for selecting instructional materials.

SELPA Directors/County Offices of Education

1. Maintain samples of good instructional materials for teacher review.
2. Coordinate/pool local resources to provide workshops on effective instructional materials.

How Things Were Left

The SDSU/AIR project does not close until June 30, 1995, at which time the state-level strategic planning will be completed as will the district-level strategic planning in the San Diego Unified School District. During the 1994-95 academic year in the San Jose Unified School District, changes occurred in administrative personnel at four levels: superintendent, associate superintendent for curriculum, director of special education, and several special education program administrators. These new leaders have needed to investigate the potential usefulness of the strategic planning activity around issues of special education teacher satisfaction, retention, and attrition, and to do so within the context of the many other challenges they have faced as newly appointed administrators. For this reason, by the close of the current project, only the initial stage of strategic planning will have been completed in the SJUSD.

SDSU/AIR's Conclusions About Outcomes of the Strategic Planning Process

The SDSU/AIR team was gratified by the stakeholders' enthusiasm and the quality of their participation in strategic planning activities. It was evident from their feedback that the process had raised their consciousness about factors contributing to teacher satisfaction and retention. It was also apparent that the three-year collaboration had instilled in the stakeholders an appreciation of the value of a data-based approach to strategic decision making.

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